

## **An Interpretation of the Economic Impact of the Wilmington Riot of 1897**

### **Summary of Preliminary Findings**

By

Tod Hamilton and William Darity

#### **1. Introduction**

America has a long history of race-related civil unrest. In the late 1800s and earlier 1900s, there were several attacks by white mobs on prosperous black communities resulting in the killing of black citizens and the destruction of black homes and businesses. Most notable are those that occurred in Danville, Virginia in 1883, Wilmington in 1898, New Orleans, Louisiana in 1900, Atlanta, Georgia in 1906, Tulsa, Oklahoma in 1921, and Rosewood, Florida in 1923.

Although all of the above riots were devastating to their local black communities, one of the most significant riots in American history is the Wilmington riot of 1898. In November, 1898, an organized white mob massacred an unknown number of black citizens in Wilmington and, at gunpoint, forced the resignation of most of the local municipal government. Many of the black and white leaders of the Republican party were banished from the town, never allowed to return.

After the riot, the demographics of the city drastically changed. Prior to the riot, blacks comprised 56% of the city of Wilmington's population which numbered 20,055 persons. In the days and months that followed the riot, many black citizens left the city—approximately 14% of the black citizens permanently left Wilmington. By 1900, and for the first time since before the Civil War, blacks were no longer the majority within the